

## PLANNING BOARD STAFF REPORT

**DATE:** March 28, 2011

**TO:** HONORABLE PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS OF THE  
PLANNING BOARD  
  
HONORABLE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE  
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

**FROM:** **Andrew Thomas, Planning Services Manager**  
510.747.6881  
athomas@ci.alameda.ca.us

**SUBJECT:** **Webster Street Vision Plan Implementation Plan**

### **BACKGROUND**

In July 2010, the City of Alameda presented a “vision” for Webster Street to the West Alameda community. The Webster Street Vision Plan was designed to depict - through a series of images and ideas – a vision of what the Webster Street Business District could become through a series of targeted actions.

At the July meeting of the Planning Board, the vision was well received and the discussion with the community focused on how the City of Alameda, the Planning Board and Economic Development Commission, and the West Alameda Business Association (WABA) could work together to ensure that the ideas and concepts depicted in the Vision plan get transformed from idea to reality.

Since the July meeting, staff has prepared a final version of the Webster Street Vision Plan. (Attached) The attached vision plan is very similar to the 2010 version except that short sections of text have been added to describe the images and concepts and an implementation check list or “grocery list” has been added at the end of the document to assist the City and WABA manage implementation and realization of the concepts and ideas in the Vision Plan.

### **ANALYSIS**

Opportunism and Flexibility: Given the state of the economy and the scarcity of local private or public resources to implement the Webster Street Vision Plan, staff is recommending that WABA and the City work together to position the Webster Street Business District to be opportunistic and flexible to respond to opportunities to improve Webster Street when they arise. Revitalization of

Webster Street and completion of all the ideas and concepts in the Vision Plan will take many years. Given the state of the national and local economy, neither the City nor the Webster Street property owners have excess resources to spend upgrading, improving, and investing in the revitalization of Webster Street. The demand for new retail spaces by new retailers and restaurants is weaker today than it has been in many years. Banks are extremely cautious making loans on commercial properties. The weak commercial market makes it extremely difficult for private property owners to invest in their properties. Likewise, the current economy and the Governor's proposals for the restructuring and elimination of redevelopment agencies in California mean that the City of Alameda has very little resources to commit to the redevelopment of Webster Street.

The Grocery List: The "Grocery List" is a list of items or actions that are culled from the Vision Plan that would contribute to the revitalization of Webster Street. Similar to a grocery list, the items are not related to one another, accomplishing all of the items would be great, but accomplishing any one of the items would also be good, and none of the items require that one be accomplished before another.

The Grocery List is designed to be a useful tool for WABA and the City. It serves as a reminder of all the items that WABA and the City should be pursuing and attempting to accomplish if the opportunity arises. In some cases the items require extensive work and coordination with outside agencies (such as modification to Caltrans signs or the Webster and Posey Street Portals). In other cases, the items require active cooperation and involvement of a property owner (such as the proposal for the upgrades to the "Tin Building"). In other cases, the items require significant public funding (such as completing the sidewalk and street lighting improvements for the last few blocks of Webster Street).

The Grocery List is not prioritized. All items on the list are important. The City and WABA cannot afford everything on the list right now, but if an item is "on sale" then this limited opportunity to complete the item should be taken. As opportunities arise, WABA and the City must be ready and able to adjust priorities to leverage those opportunities to the advantage of Webster Street. For example, if a property is sold, such as the Tin Building, then WABA and the City should be ready, if possible, to make any available façade improvement funds available for the rehabilitation of the property. If the State of California releases an opportunity for grant funds for roadway and pedestrian improvement projects, the City and WABA must be ready to submit a competitive application for those funds. (A competitive application for this type of grant is an application that is backed up with a pre-approved plan for the improvements)

The Grocery List is not exhaustive. It is designed to change. Over time, new priorities and ideas will arise. As they do, they can and should be added to the list. As and when items are completed, they may be removed from the list. The list is merely a tool to be used by WABA, the City and the larger community to ensure that good ideas are not lost or good opportunities are not missed.

A Webster Street Vision Implementation Committee: To be successful in its efforts to be opportunistic and capitalize on all future opportunities, WABA and the City must be organized, ready, and efficient with its limited resources.

At the July 2010 Planning Board and Economic Commission meeting, the discussion focused on the need to establish an “implementation committee” to oversee the implementation of the Vision Plan.

Staff recommends that WABA identify an existing WABA committee or establish a new committee to oversee the implementation of the Vision Plan. The committee could include representatives from the business community, the adjacent neighborhoods, the Planning Board, and the Economic Development Commission. Staff would not sit on the committee, but a City staff member should attend the meetings to report on relevant city efforts related to the items on the Grocery List.

Staff is not recommending that the City of Alameda establish a new City board of commission or task force to implement the Webster Street Vision Plan. Although City participation is essential to success, WABA should take the lead in planning for and prioritizing improvements on Webster Street. The City and city staff should be in a support role, not a leadership role. Likewise, the Planning Board and the Economic Development Commission can and should support the WABA efforts, but their primary function is to oversee developments Citywide. Finally, the City of Alameda simply does not have the resources necessary to staff and maintain another City board, commission or committee.

As a WABA-led committee, the committee would and could establish its own meeting times and agendas, revise and update the Grocery List as necessary to reflect new opportunities and WABA priorities, and actively advocate for WABA initiatives. If the Committee has representation from the Planning Board, the Economic Development Commission, and the adjacent neighborhood, recommendations from the WABA committee that require City action would likely find little resistance in the approval process because those recommendations would have considered business district, neighborhood, and citywide interests.

Positioning for Success. Although resources and funds for physical improvements are limited, the WABA committee and City staff can be working to position Webster Street to be better able to take advantage of opportunities when they arise. For example, State and Federal grant opportunities may arise to fund major capital improvements on Webster Street. To be competitive for these funds, WABA and the City should do the work necessary to agree on what kinds of improvements are necessary and appropriate and complete any necessary discretionary approvals so that the proposed improvements are “shovel-ready” and therefore more competitive for grant funding. Likewise, if there are any regulatory barriers to achieving a desired public or private improvement, those regulatory barriers can be removed to “pave the way” and facilitate the future

improvements. For example, in a companion staff report on this evening's agenda, staff is recommending that the height limits be modified on Webster Street on the Days Inn site and at the south end of Webster Street. In both cases, the intent of the modification is to remove a regulatory barrier (the current 40 foot height limit) which would render two concepts in the Vision Plan infeasible. In both cases, there is no current funding or application to construct the improvements, but by removing the regulatory barriers in advance, staff is hoping to facilitate and encourage future funding and/or applications to implement the Vision Plan concepts.

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The proposed Webster Street Vision Plan and the recommended actions are statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15262 Feasibility and Planning Studies.

#### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

A notice for this hearing published in the Alameda Journal and posted at the subject property. Staff has not received any public comments on the proposed zoning text.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

That the Planning Board and the Economic Development Commission work with the Webster Street Business Association to establish a Webster Street Vision Implementation Committee.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED BY:

---

Andrew Thomas  
PLANNING SERVICES MANAGER

Attachment(s):

1. Webster Street Vision Plan and the Grocery List